

NARRATION TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

| Challenge | Looks or Sounds like... | Try this |
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| Child gives too much Information | Takes almost as long as or longer than the original passage. | Try an egg timer. Once for the main idea big picture, then 2 or 3 more times to fill in the rest of the story. Train them to order their own thoughts. |
| Highly imaginative narration with extra things thrown in | Adds descriptions that weren't there. | Alternate the type of narration: you can have them act it out or draw a picture. When drift into imagination, ask them to just stick to the story and but draw a picture of what could have happened afterwards. |
| Short, incomplete narration | "The duck got lost." (from <i>The Story of Ping</i>) | "Tell me everything you remember about this chapter." If that didn't work to get more, try "What else can you think of?" Remember to use open ended questions. |
| Vague | "This guy did something somewhere near that important place a long time ago." | At older ages, this kind of response can hide a bigger issue like dyslexia (speaking from my son's experience!) You can try pre-writing a note card or white board with two or three important facts like names, dates or events. Very brief. You then allow them to look at the card while they narrate. |
| Inaccurate narration | Wrong details or facts | Don't be too corrective. At younger ages, allow inaccuracies. Ask gentle questions and teach siblings to do the same. Say, "Hmmm. I'm not sure I remember it that way." You can also try writing the key names or places on the white board. You may have to use shorter passages. |
| Exact replica of the narration | Word for word recall | Some kids can do this. Ask some open ended questions later in the day or the next day regarding the passage to make sure it's going into long term memory. You can also try longer passages. |
| Misses the point | Tells everything that happened except the main point. | This usually happens in narration when first starting. They'll often say just the last thing they heard. That's OK. Keep building from small to big. If narration is way off, allow a second child to do a narration of the same passage or model it yourself. This issue takes time or maturity to improve. |
| Wrong story order | Doesn't use words like "first, then, next, finally." Or starts at the end (what was just read) and then remembers the beginning last. | You can ask open ended questions using those sequencing words like, "What happened first?" You can also have them draw stick figure narrations on cards and then actually reorder them together. You can model this also. But remember—short lessons. This isn't supposed to take all afternoon. |
| Resistance: Like pulling nails to get any narration | One word narrations only in answer to questions. Mood is negative. "This is stupid." | This often happens with the older learner who is used to other learning methodologies – like worksheets or multiple choice tests, e.g. if you've recently pulled them out of school. They might think you want the "right" answer. Start small and do a lot of modeling. Have them read to you and you narrate, then switch. |

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| Resistance & frustration | "It's too hard!" | Maybe it is. Start smaller. Make sure you aren't "correcting" their narrations. Be careful of your own perfectionism. A child is not going to narrate perfectly at first. That's ok. Write down their narrations for them at least 2 or 3 times a semester to see how much they have improved. You'll even see improvement over 6 months. Switch roles: Have the child read a passage to you with you narrating and the child acting how you act. You may see what they are thinking. |
| Wiggles take over | Child can't sit to listen or to retell or listening takes place while upside-down. | Some kids need movement to listen better at first. Their ability to listen stretches with practice. But you can allow wiggling (try a yoga ball.) Some kinesthetic learners enjoy a squish ball or Lego play to do something with their hands while listening. As long as it doesn't get distracting and it helps them focus. Try different things to find the right level for your family. |
| <i>Multiple children:</i> one child tells everything leaving nothing for anyone else to tell | Best narrator has gone first | Switch the order of narrators or only have one child narrate a section. If you start with the shortest narrator, ask, "Can anyone add anything to that?" In our group narrations at co-op, the leader says, "Let's go around and each say one thing that struck them about that passage." |
| <i>Multiple children:</i> Better narrator corrects if mistake is made | Interruptions like "That's not right!" or "Mama, that didn't happen!" | You have to lay down the ground rules and model acceptance of a narration. Get the interrupter to not interrupt. At the end of the narration, make any necessary corrections gently. |
| Blank stares | Child has no clue how to start | Ask, "Can you retell the story in your own words as if telling it to someone who just walked in the room?" Try the question words: Who, what, where, when, why, how? |
| Any Problem in general | | Go back to basics. Make sure you are using living books, not twaddle. Model how it can be done. Make sure you are not "instructing" or correcting too much. Have fun. Start with short lessons. |